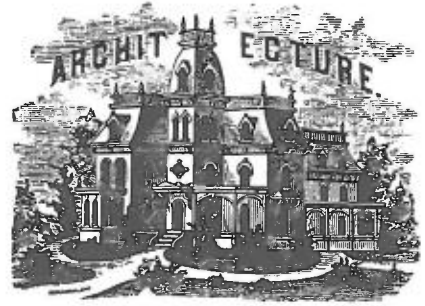


A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine



William H. Dabney, Jr. 1855-1897

The development of watering places along the Maine coast during the last quarter of the nineteenth century provided opportunities for architects to build practices in summer communities. One Boston practitioner who did so was William H. Dabney, Jr., who designed at least five buildings at York Harbor between the early 1880s and the mid-1890s. Dabney was born in 1855 at Fayal, Azores, where his father was American vice-consul, and received his architectural education at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology between 1871 and 1875.¹ He spent the next year traveling abroad and returned in 1877 to begin a twelve year career as a draftsman for the Manufacturers' Mutual Fire Insurance Company in Boston. Dabney also may have worked in the same capacity for the Boston Water Works. During this early phase of the architect's life, he also obtained independent commissions for mills and other structures.² Dabney was married to Marianne Parker, probably at the end of his M.I.T. years. The couple evidently spent some time in the Azores, for their elder daughter Julia was born there. During the period that Dabney practiced in Boston, his family — which also included a second daughter, O. Fredericka — lived in Brookline, Massachusetts.³

The first of Dabney's York projects was an early expression of the Colonial Revival style, a small cottage called "Redcote" (Figure 1) on the York River, apparently begun for a member of the architect's family in the fall of 1882.⁴ Its early incorporation of forms drawn from vernacular buildings of the Colonial period was won "Redcote" a place in the history of American architecture.⁵ Indeed, its small scale, simple lines, and shingled exterior — as seen in the original design — are all architectural elements that could have been observed on eighteenth century warehouses and other commercial buildings that survived nearby along the York River. On the interior, the house is simple in plan, possessing just a large "hall" and kitchen on the first story.⁶

Probably designed within a few years of "Redcote" was Dabney's cottage for a Mrs. Peters, now demolished but documented in drawings in the collection of the Old York Historical Society. The plans and elevations for the Peters Cottage illustrate a somewhat more spacious summer house than "Redcote", and one which reflects the elaborate summer social life of York Harbor, where it was located. There is a large piazza on the ocean side of the cottage, while on the interior the architect has provided ample living spaces, servants' quarters, and storage spaces for trunks. Like "Redcote", the Peters Cottage displayed stylistic elements derived from Colonial architecture, including windows with panes in a diamond pattern, turned

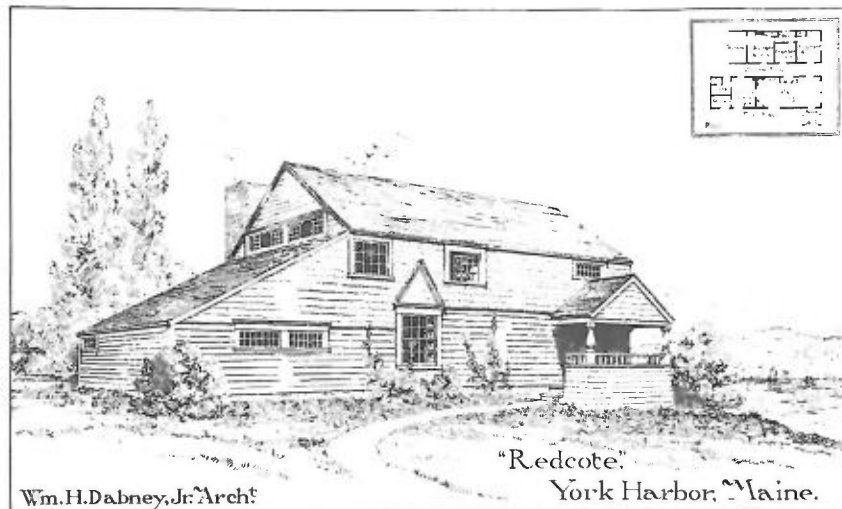


Figure 1. Redcote, York Harbor, *The American Architect and Building News*, September 16, 1882 (Courtesy of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities).

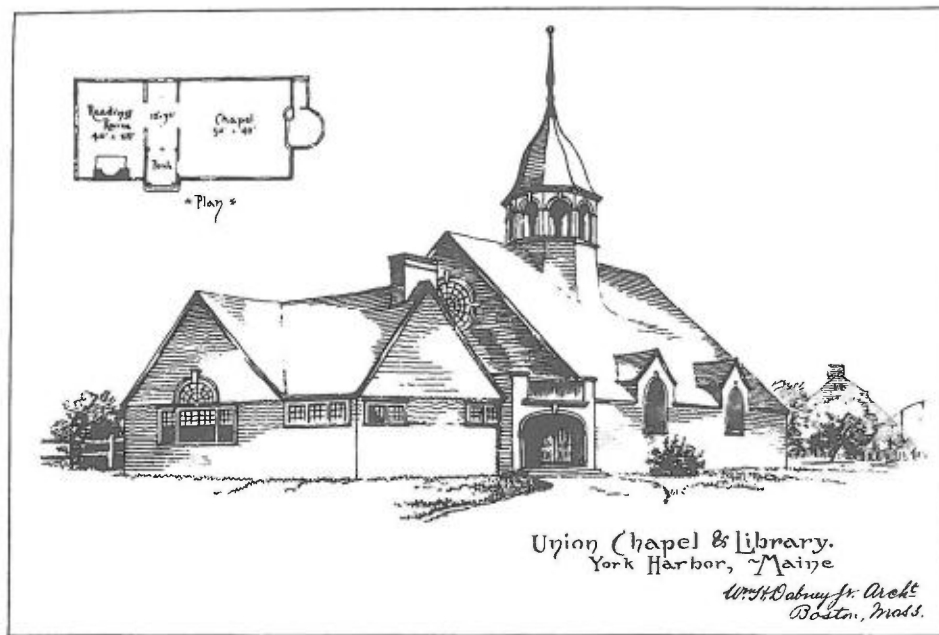


Figure 2. Union Chapel and Library, York Harbor, Building, November 5, 1887
(Courtesy of the Avery Library, Columbia University).

balusters on exterior railings, broad gabled roof profiles, and a combination of clapboards and wood shingles covering the outside walls. All of these features were part of a vocabulary of Colonial Revival architecture as applied to summer residences along the Maine coast.⁷

One of Dabney's best clients in York Harbor was Dr. Frederick Stackpole, for whom he designed the Union Chapel and Library, now St. George's Episcopal Church, in 1887 (Figure 2). The building originally consisted of a reading room and chapel separated by a porch. Like Dabney's cottages, the Union Chapel and Library displayed the wide roof profile and variety of exterior sheathing materials that were thought to have been characteristic of vernacular buildings from the Colonial period. That Dabney intended to relate the new structure to local building traditions is evidenced by the gambrel-roofed dwelling which he included in the background of his perspective view of the Chapel and Library. At the same time this building also incorporated elements of more high-style architecture through its Palladian and Gothic-style windows as well as its cupola.⁸

Approximately eight years after completing the Union Chapel and Library, Frederick Stackpole built a large commercial block just in front of the earlier building and facing on York Street in York Harbor. Called the Stackpole Block at the time of its construction, the building is better known now as the Lancaster Building (Figure 3). This high-style Georgian Revival design traditionally has been ascribed to E. B. Blaisdell, the prolific architect-contractor of York who was responsible for the construction of the building. However, references in the local newspaper indicate that William Dabney was in York Harbor working for Stackpole at the time that the building was going up,

and the proximity of his earlier commission for the same client — the Union Chapel and Library — suggest that the Boston architect may have been responsible for the Lancaster Building. Contemporary works outside of Maine also attest to Dabney's familiarity with the sophisticated Georgian detailing that adorns the Lancaster Building, and it was not unusual for architects from urban areas to utilize Blaisdell as their local agent.⁹

Dr. Frederick Stackpole was one of several entrepreneurs who took advantage of York's growing popularity as a summer resort by building cottages to rent for the season. Someone who did likewise was Hartley W. Mason, who purchased a large parcel of land at York Harbor in 1873 and from then until the 1890s erected a group of summer cottages and commercial buildings which catered to the summer clientele. On December 18, 1891, the *York Courant* reported that "Will Dabney, architect, arranged plans for the alteration of one of H. W. Mason's cottages". A reference from January of the following year suggests that the cottage being remodelled was "Overbank", Mason's largest house at the harbor. It is likely that the mansard-roofed section of the building had been constructed during the late 1870s. Photographic evidence suggests that Dabney was responsible for connecting the main house with an existing stable near the street which he adapted to function as a service and bedroom wing, as well as redesigning the porch which overlooks the Harbor Beach to include an octagonal section at one corner.¹⁰

Although it is clear that Dabney worked independently on his York Harbor commissions, by 1890 he was in partnership with Henry B. Ball (b. 1866), a native of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, who was associated with the class of 1888 at the Massachusetts



Figure 3. Lancaster Building, York Harbor, circa 1896 view (MHPC).

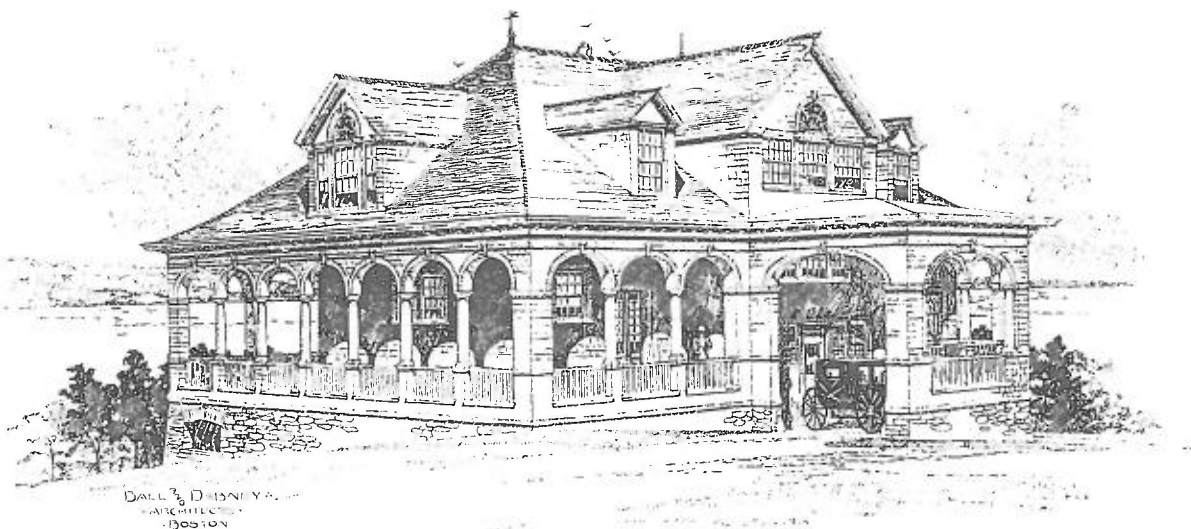
Institute of Technology. Like many practitioners of the Colonial Revival style, Ball apprenticed with the Boston firm of Peabody and Stearns and traveled abroad to study European architecture before establishing his own office.¹¹

Between the formation of Ball's and Dabney's partnership in 1890 and Dabney's death seven years later, the firm produced designs for at least two buildings in Maine. They developed plans for a chapel in Sullivan in 1891 and for a library in Sorrento in 1893.¹² Both projects continued Dabney's interest in modest institutional buildings reflected in his earlier York Harbor commissions. Like the Union Chapel and Library in York Harbor, the Public Library in Sorrento included an open porch as an integral part of the plan, a particularly useful feature to the social life of the summer community (Figure 4). Donated by Mrs. Frank

Jones, the library was praised by the *Bar Harbor Record* at the time of its completion in July, 1893, as an "appropriate contribution to the beauty and growth of Sorrento".¹³ In its exterior detailing, the Sorrento Public Library echoes its York counterpart through its Palladian windows and Federal style arches with accented keystones at the porch openings.

Although William Dabney's partnership with Henry Ball ended after less than a decade had passed since its inception, the firm had several successors that continued into the twentieth century. References exist to Massachusetts commissions executed by firms which had the names of "Ball, Dabney and Hayward", "Ball and Hayward", and "Dabney and Hayward". While some confusion about the firm name may have been produced in public records such as building permits, it seems that a professional association existed between Dabney, Ball, and Henry C. Hayward that began around 1897 and was continued by the two latter partners after Dabney's death. The firm of Dabney and Hayward is credited with the design of the W.C. Allison Cottage in Bar Harbor, which was completed at the time of Dabney's death in April of that year. Henry Ball's son, James T. Ball, was also an architect and was active in residential design in the Boston area from as early as 1914 through at least the late 1920s.¹⁴ The later firms turned their attention from summer resorts to the suburbs as a source of commissions. However, William Dabney's followers appear to have continued to design houses in the Colonial Revival and Shingle Style idioms that he had pioneered in Maine in the 1880s and 1890s.

Kevin D. Murphy



THE PUBLIC LIBRARY. GIFT OF MRS. FRANK JONES.

Figure 4. Public Library, Sorrento, rendering in 1893 Sorrento promotional brochure (MHPC).

NOTES

- ¹ Dabney entered M.I.T. in the same year as Frank and Herbert Dabney, both of whom were also born at Fayal, Azores, but who did not share the same parents with each other or with William H. Dabney. Frank and Herbert Dabney were both chemistry students at M.I.T. The three Dabneys may have been cousins who came to Boston in 1871 to pursue their college educations. E.A.W. Hammatt, *Class of '75 M.I.T., 1875-1915*, Cambridge, 1915, pp. 13-14.
 - ² Obituaries for William H. Dabney, *Boston Evening Transcript*, April 30, 1897, p. 5; *The [Brookline, Massachusetts] Chronicle*, May 1, 1897, p. 2; *American Architect and Building News*, 1897, p. 42. Additional biographical information was obtained from the records of the M.I.T. Museum.
 - ³ Obituary for Julia P. Dabney, *Boston Transcript*, April 2, 1932, p. 4.
 - ⁴ The design for "Redcote" was published in the *American Architect and Building News*, September 16, 1882. The land on which the house stands was sold to Alice P. Stevens of Brookline, Massachusetts, in 1881; in 1884 Stevens sold half interest in the land and house to Julia P. Dabney, the architect's daughter. See York County Registry of Deeds, Alfred, Book 383, p. 120 and Book 402, p. 116.
 - ⁵ Vincent J. Scully, Jr., has written of "Redcote" that the cottage "...expresses a casual and appealing adjustment to function". With this phrase Scully makes the house part of a development in American architecture from Shingle Style buildings in the East to the designs of Frank Lloyd Wright and his Prairie School contemporaries in which form is seen as a direct expression of function. See Vincent J. Scully, Jr., *The Shingle Style and the Stick Style*, New Haven and London, 1977, pp. 89-90.
 - ⁶ Additions were made to "Redcote" by owners Ellen C. Edwards and Rosalie Edwards about 1916.
 - ⁷ C. Richard Steadman, a summer resident of York Harbor since 1898, recollected in a personal interview on August 18, 1989, that a cottage owned by the Peters family in York Harbor was demolished during the 1920s.
 - ⁸ The Union Chapel and Library was moved to a site on York Street in York Harbor in 1882, at which time substantial changes were made to the building, including the removal of its cupola. See the York Harbor Intensive Architectural Survey, Old York Historical Society files.
 - ⁹ On November 16, 1894, the *York Courant* stated that "Dr. Frederick B. Stackpole with his architect, Mr. Dabney, was at the Harbor". The same newspaper on December 28, 1894, reported that "a portion of the eastern end of the new Stackpole block was blown in during the gale", and finally on July 5, 1895, it was stated that "the Stackpole block opened for business". Other high-style Georgian Revival buildings by Ball and Dabney include the residence of Wallace Hackett, Esq. on Middle Street in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, built between 1891 and 1892, and the summer residence of Mrs. David Nevin at Nantucket, built in 1903.
- E.B. Blaisdell was the local agent for Boston architect T.W. Silloway when he redesigned the First Parish Congregational Church in York in 1882. The relationship between the two men was described as follows in an article entitled "The Old Church at York" published in the *Portland Daily Press*, October 28, 1882: "The remodelling has been done under the architectural supervision of Thomas W. Silloway of Boston, and under the immediate charge of Mr. E.B. Blaisdell of York, who has from the first given personal attention to see that the plans of the architect were strictly followed." Earle Shettleworth kindly brought this reference to my attention.

- ¹⁰ At approximately the same date as the alteration to "Overbank", another of Hartley Mason's cottages, "Rocky Knoll", was constructed on a piece of land directly adjacent. It is possible that Dabney may have been involved in the design of this new cottage as well. A photograph in the collection of the Old York Historical Society of the Mason Estate in 1888 shows "Overbank" without its new porch and the "Rocky Knoll" site entirely vacant. Another photograph in the Old York collection, which probably dates from the 1890s, pictures "Overbank" after the alterations had been carried out and "Rocky Knoll" completed. Photographs of the two cottages were published, along with their plans, in a promotional brochure produced by the York Harbor Village Corporation about 1930 and entitled *York Harbor, Maine*. For additional information on York Harbor cottages built by H.W. Mason and Frederick Stackpole, see the York Harbor Intensive Architectural Survey, Old York Historical Society.
- ¹¹ Biographical information on Henry B. Ball is contained in Edwin M. Bacon, *Boston of Today*, Boston, 1892, p. 137. Ball continued to have ties to the Portsmouth area and in 1892 designed a new fireplace and table for the Portsmouth Athenaeum. These projects are documented by a drawing for the fireplace in the Athenaeum collection and by a reference in the Directors' Minutes for October 8, 1892.
- ¹² The design for the chapel in Sullivan was noted in the *Bar Harbor Record*, October 8, 1891.
- ¹³ *Bar Harbor Record*, July 13, 1893.
- ¹⁴ Information on the successor firms was provided by the Brookline, Massachusetts Preservation Commission. Henry Ball entered M.I.T. in 1884 with a classmate named James T. Ball from Derby Line, Vermont, who could have been a cousin and the namesake of Henry Ball's son. See M.I.T. catalogue for academic year 1884-85.

LIST OF KNOWN COMMISSIONS IN MAINE BY WILLIAM H. DABNEY

"Redcote", York Harbor, 1882, Altered
 Peters Cottage, York Harbor, circa 1885, Demolished
 Union Chapel and Library, York Harbor, 1887, Altered
 "Overbank", Hartley W. Mason Cottage, York Harbor, 1891-92, Alterations, Extant

Attributed to William H. Dabney
 Stackpole Block (Lancaster Building), York Harbor, 1894-95, Extant

Ball and Dabney
 Chapel, Sullivan, 1891, Not Executed
 Public Library, Sorrento, 1892-93, Extant

Dabney and Hayward
 "Wazee-Lo-Wan", W.C. Allison Cottage, Bar Harbor, 1896-97, Destroyed

ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS

No firm archives for William H. Dabney, Ball and Dabney, or any of the successors are known to exist. Drawings for the Peters House at York Harbor, circa 1885, are in the collection of the Old York Historical Society. Photographs of and blueprints for the Thomas Aspinwall House in Brookline, Massachusetts (1896), signed by Ball and Dabney, are in the collection of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, Boston.